

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Every Yom Tov has a theme, a message to focus on and take with us for the year. Pesach is about our birth as a nation through our shared experiences of slavery and being freed from it by the Creator, witnessing (via the plagues and the splitting of the sea) G-d defying the laws of nature He had set forth, and teaching our history, theology and laws to the next generation. Shavuot is a time to strengthen our commitment to the Torah as well as thanking G-d for the first harvest. Rosh Hashana, being days of divine judgment, is a time of introspection and self-assessment (including New Year resolutions), our yearly reminder that G-d knows every detail of our lives, including our thoughts, actions and in-actions, and that they matter. Yom Kippur is our "final exam," when we commit to doing as much as we can to improve, to right what was wrong, with G-d responding by giving us a clean slate. What about Succos? What is the "take home" message of living in the Succah for a week, and of taking the lulav/esrog/hadasim/aravos?

"In order that you shall know for generations that I (G-d) had the Children of Israel dwell in huts when I took them out of Egypt." Although the verse (Vayikra 23:43) seems rather explicit as to what the purpose of Succos is, why is it so important that we know that G-d had us dwell in huts during our travels from Egypt to the Promised Land? The Talmud (Succah 11b) discusses whether the verse means literally "huts," or whether it refers to the "Clouds of Glory" that surrounded and protected us during that time. Much has been written about the "Clouds of Glory" representing G-d's involvement in the world, and that G-d still being involved in His creation is one of the primary messages of Succos. There is no doubt, though, that they also lived in physical "huts" (or tents, see Bamidbar 24:5), and the simple, literal reading of the verse also applies. What is the message behind our needing to "know" that the Children of Israel lived in physical huts for the 40 years in the desert?

Each of the Shalosh Regalim have an agricultural aspect to them. Pesach is the time of the barley harvest, and we bring a "Korbon Omer" (Vayikra 23:9-14) to thank G-d for it. Shavuot is the beginning of the wheat harvest, and we bring the "Shtei Halechem" (23:16-20) to thank G-d for it. Succos coincides with the

end of the harvest of the fruits and vegetables, and we take the lulav/esrog to thank G-d for these too. The message of these three things is very clear; we don't attribute our successful harvests to nature running its course, but acknowledge that it comes from the One True Source of it all.

But is success a true measure of G-d's involvement in the world? Are those who are less successful experiencing less divine involvement? By the same token, does success indicate more divine involvement? Although the level (and consistency) of divine involvement that each person experiences is a function of the level (and consistency) of their attachment to G-d, alongside the need to recognize that everything comes from G-d is a danger of attributing the amount of success to the level of divine involvement. Not everyone is better off being rich; for some, "real" success (read: continued spiritual growth) is more likely to occur if the distractions and temptations that come with having more money and possessions are not there.

In the desert, the Children of Israel ate the "mun" that fell daily from heaven, drank the waters from Miriam's miraculous well, and were protected from the elements by the "Clouds of Glory." G-d's involvement was very evident, yet that didn't amount to physical riches. When all three harvests were completed, along with the need to thank G-d for the wonderful bounty comes the need to put it in perspective. We therefore take the lulav/esrog (et al.) while we say Hallel to thank G-d for all that He's given us, but live in a succah to remind us that even when G-d took us out of Egypt and were experiencing obvious divine involvement, we still just lived in huts. The size of a house and stock portfolio is not the best way to measure the level of divine involvement. The schach of the succah reminds us of the "Clouds of Glory" and G-d's constant involvement in our lives, while the succah itself reminds us that the success we are thankful for is not necessarily the best indication of that involvement.

In this context, the verses can be read as a commandment to "live in a succah for seven days," the same seven days we take the lulav/esrog to thank G-d for the harvest, "so that you know that when I (G-d) took the Children of Israel out of Egypt" and they were experiencing complete and obvious divine involvement, "I had them dwell in huts," simple dwelling places to match the basic "bread" and water diet. Yes, the message of Succos is that G-d is involved in the world He created, but it is also that His being involved doesn't

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automatically mean having monetary wealth. Succos is a time to rejoice with what G-d gave us; true wealth is only experienced by those happy with their portion.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“But on the 15th day of the seventh month, when you harvest the grain of the land, you shall celebrate a festival to the Lord for seven days [Succot], with the first day being a day of rest and the eighth day being a day of rest" (23:39).

Efrat, Israel - What is the true symbolism of the succa? The Talmud (B.T. Succa 11b) cites a difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer as to whether the succa commemorates the actual huts in which the Israelites dwelt in the desert, or the "clouds of glory" which encompassed us as a sign of Divine protection.

Leviticus chapter 23 catalogs all the holy days of the Hebrew calendar, beginning with the Sabbath and concluding with Succot. The 33rd verse begins a description of Succot: "The 15th day of the seventh month shall be the festival of Succot, seven days for the Lord; the first day shall be a holy convocation, when you may not perform creative work..."

The text goes on to mention the festival of the Eighth Day of Assembly (Shmini Atzeret), and then seemingly concludes the entire calendar sequence with the words: "These are the special appointed times of the Lord" (23:37).

But just as we thought the description of the festivals was complete, the narrative inexplicably reverts to Succot. This time, however, the Bible stresses the connection to the Land of Israel, and the agricultural cycle: "But on the 15th day of the seventh month, when you harvest the grain of the land, you shall celebrate a festival to the Lord for seven days (Succot), with the first day being a day of rest and the eighth day being a day of rest" (23:39).

Another curious feature of this second account is that having repeated the command to observe Succot in the context of the farmers' work, the Bible now introduces other crucial themes of the festival, including the command to take up four species of plant

indigenous to Israel (citron, palm frond, myrtle branch and willow), and rejoice on our holy days, wrapping up its description with a repetition of the command to dwell in booths, this time stressing the historical aspects of the festival: "You shall dwell in booths for seven days, so that your generations shall know that I caused the Israelites to live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your G-d" (23: 42-43).

It seems that the Bible is making a clear distinction between the significance of Succot before the Israelites entered the Land and the nature of the festival once we were living in Israel. Why is that?

Outside Israel, the hut-like booths symbolized our temporary dwellings while we wandered across the desert and, by extension, throughout our long exile. Once we entered the country, "when they harvested the grain of the land," we could celebrate the harvest with special blessings and rituals involving the four species - vegetation unavailable in the desert. In the Promised Land, the entire experience of the succa assumed a heightened significance. Now, the shabby, makeshift desert huts came to represent the sheltering wings of the Divine Presence, the clouds of glory with which G-d protected us so that we'd be able to fulfill our mission as His divine ambassadors. When we are living in the Diaspora, the succa can only teach us to be grateful to the Lord who preserves us under difficult and dangerous conditions; whereas living in Israel, we understand that as the people of G-d's covenant, no matter how flimsy the walls of our temporary homes may seem, we constantly live under His protective grace.

This essential difference in the significance of the succa prior to our inhabiting the Land of Israel and afterwards could also be seen when we returned to the Land after our Babylonian exile. Then, Ezra exhorted us to dwell in booths during the Festival of the Seventh Month, and to make our booths with "olive leaves and olive branches, with myrtles, psalms and willows" (Nehemiah 8:15). In the Land of Israel, the succa is adorned and uplifted by the local vegetation, the special fragrance of which symbolizes G-d's shelter and fulfillment of the Divine covenant. Seen in this light, as the Vilna Gaon noted, Succot is the festival which celebrates our entry into the Land!

G-d's revelation and gift took place on the 10th of Tishrei, Yom Kippur. The following day, He commanded the building of the Sanctuary; and the Israelites collected materials for the next two days. Then, on the 15th of Tishrei, the work of building the Sanctuary began, marking the restoration of the relationship between G-d and the Jews. This is noted by the Ramban, who explains that this is why the Book of Exodus is indeed the Book of Redemption.

"Then the Holy One Blessed be He returned and rested His Divine Presence among them and they returned to the exalted level of the patriarchs, which was the secret of G-d, with Clouds of Glory upon their

tents, and they were considered to be redeemed. And so the Book of Exodus ends with the completion of the Sanctuary and with the Glory of G-d filling it always." (Ramban - Introduction to Book of Exodus).

Hence the succa, clouds of divine glory, symbolize the Sanctuary and the Holy Temple in Jerusalem - which will eventually bring the entire world to peace and redemption. "May the Merciful One restore the fallen succa of David, speedily and in our time."
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RABBI HERSHEL SCHACHTER

TorahWeb

The halacha requires that one dwell in the sukkah for the duration of the yom tov in the same way one would live in his own home: eating, sleeping, learning, etc. In the language of the Talmud (Sukkah 28b), "teishvu ke'ein toduru".

The Talmud (Shabbos 133b) speaks of fulfilling all mitzvos in an elegant fashion-an elegant talis, an elegant pair of tefillin, etc. The same certainly applies to the mitzvah of sukkah as well. In addition to that general halacha, making the sukkah fancy constitutes a particular enhancement of mitzvas sukkah because of teishvu ke'ein toduru. We all add drapes, wall paper, carpeting, etc. to our homes to beautify them and make them more comfortable, so the same ought to be supplied to the Sukkah.

In Yiddish folklore there was a common humorous saying that if one doesn't speak loshon hora at all in the sukkah, he hasn't fulfilled the mitzvah because it's lacking ke'ein toduru, since at home we always speak loshon hora. This is the historical background of the comment in the Mishan Brura (639, note 2) that one must certainly be careful not to talk any loshon hora in the sukkah. The Talmud (Sukkah 9a) derives a din doraysa from a passuk that just as a korban chagigah has kedusha, so too the sukkah has kedusha. According to the Ramban, this passuk is the source on the principal that all religious articles (eg. an esrog or tzitzis) become huktzah l'mitzvason for the duration of the mitzvah. Because of the sanctity of the sukkah, one should avoid discussing divrei chol, and certainly loshon hora. The loshon hora belongs neither in our homes nor in our sukkos.

After one has finished eating it is considered disrespectful to the sanctity of the sukkah to leave around the dirty utensils which one no longer plans to use (Sukkah 29a). Some poskim write that it is disrespectful to bring an infant into the sukkah who may dirty his diaper.

Towards the end of parshas Re'eh (Devarim 16:13) the chumash records the mitzvah to celebrate the yom tov of Sukkos for seven days during the ingathering season. All summer long it doesn't rain in Eretz Yisroel, and only after Sukkos, when we expect the rains to begin, do we gather in the produce from the

fields. This is the literal meaning of the passuk 's reference to the ingathering season.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 34a) has a tradition that Hashem dictated the Torah to Moshe rabbeinu in such a way that any given passuk may have more than one level of interpretation: "achas diber Elokim, shtaim zu shamati" (Tehillim 62:12). The Torah she'be'al peh has an additional level of interpretation on the aforementioned passuk in Re'eh, which is that we should construct our sukkos in such a way that they should be sturdy enough to last for the duration of the seven days of yom tov, and the se'chach we use as the roof should consist of the branches, leaves, and chaff that are separated from the produce (i.e. something that grew from the ground, is now detached, and is not edible for humans, hence not mekabel tumah). This additional level of interpretation fits in to all the words of the passuk except for "chag", which means "a holiday". How, then, can the Torah she'be'al peh interpret the passuk to refer to the construction of a sukkah?

The Talmud explains (Sukkah 9a) that only Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos are referred to in the chumash as "chag", because "chag" indicates an obligation to bring a korban chagigah, which exists only on these three yomim tovim. "Chag haSukkos", therefore, refers to the construction of the sukkah which is compared to a korban chagigah. Just as the korban Chagigah is sacred, so the sukkah is endowed with sanctity after we sit in it to fulfill our mitzvah. Because of that sanctity we must treat the sukkah with proper respect. © 2010 Rabbi H. Schachter & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI PINCHAS AVRUCH

Succos-Staying Focused

For most holidays, the Torah reading is the narration of the events the festival is commemorating. This past week's Yom Kippur reading detailed the procedures for the special service in the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple in Jerusalem). The Pesach reading recounts the Exodus from Egypt, and we read of the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuos. Succos, though, does not honor one particular event, so the reading comes from Parshas Emor, where all of the holy days are discussed in the middle of a narration of numerous facets of Divine service.

"On the fifteenth day of [Tishrei] is the festival of Succos, a seven day period for Hashem." (Vayikra/Leviticus 23:34). It is noteworthy that the Torah calls this holiday "Succos" (plural of succah) but has not, at this point, explained why a succah is germane to the celebration. It is not until the end of the narrative, even after the discussion of the mitzvah of the Four Species, in verses 42 and 43, that it is related, "You shall dwell in booths ("succos") for a seven day period...So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took

them out of the land of Egypt." If our observance of dwelling in booths is the focus of the festival, these closing verses are out of place; they should be at the opening.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Torah Jewry of his time) explains that the concept of "succah" - living in a transient, temporary abode - is not novel to the Jew. Essential to our faith is the precept that our daily existence in this world is given to us as our chance to perfect our spiritual selves and develop a G-d consciousness by utilizing mitzvah opportunities and studying Torah. Furthermore, since the physical trappings of our existence in this world are given to us as aids to achieving our spiritual objectives, there should be no discomfort when we spend money or utilize assets for the fulfillment of mitzvos or giving of charity; this is ultimately why we were given these assets!

Therefore, concludes Rabbi Feinstein, the concept of "succos" is not new, as it is lived everyday, no matter where we find ourselves. The festival of Succos was given to us to help concretize and fortify this tenet in a practical, substantive way.

This understanding also offers a deeper insight as to why we are forbidden from residing in the succah when it is extremely uncomfortable, such as when it is raining or very cold. If the essence of the succah is to teach the perspective to be maintained through our daily lives - which includes the mindset that our assets should never be the cause for a sense of discomfort because they are all a temporary means to a greater end - then that lesson cannot be learned when the succah is physically uncomfortable.

The famed Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan of Radin; 1838-1933; author of basic works in Jewish law, philosophy and ethics and renowned for his saintly qualities) once welcomed a visitor into his home. The visitor was somewhat surprised to see the Spartan conditions in which this renowned leader of Torah Judaism lived, with only a simple wooden table and some benches furnishing the main room of the simple house. When asked what bothered him, the guest blurted out, "Where is your furniture?" Rabbi Kagan responded, "Where is yours?" The visitor answered, "I am only a guest here. I didn't bring any furniture." To which the Chofetz Chaim replied, "I, too, am only a guest in this world. My most prized possessions, my Torah learning and mitzvos, are waiting for me in my real home in the World to Come."

Our liturgy refers to the festival of Succos as "the time of our happiness". After the teshuva (return to G-d) of the month of Elul, the recognition of G-d as our Father and King on Rosh HaShanah and the spiritual cleansing of Yom Kippur, we now have seven days to enjoy and revel in our new relationship with our Father in Heaven. The blessings we asked for on the High Holy

Days are not an end to themselves. The succah reminds us that we must not to become distracted by the temporal; we must keep our focus on our ultimate objective of building the bond. © 2002 Rabbi P. Avruch & Project Genesis, Inc

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the many great advantages of commemorating Succot here in Israel is the ease and ability that one has to sleep in the succah. Coming from the freezing climes of Chicago and Monsey in the United States the ability to sleep in the succah was almost always negated by the inclement weather. In those years many a bowl of soup congealed as my family and I tried to eat while all bundled up in the succah.

When I was a rabbi in Miami Beach the weather was also inhospitable - tropical humidity, assorted insects, lizards and bugs and the presence of brief but always omnipresent rain showers of some intensity. This didn't allow for any comfortable rest at night outside of the air-conditioned bedroom. But here in Jerusalem none of these factors exist and I therefore am able to sleep blissfully, or at least normally, in my mirpaset/balcony/porch/pergola/succah. And I am really grateful that I am able to do so for it gives me a heightened sense of the wonder of the holiday of Succot.

Succot represents many things and like all Torah subjects it is many layered. It is about history - our sojourn in the desert after leaving Egypt - and nature, since it is the bountiful harvest holiday of the year. It is about the recollection and commemoration of our Temple service with our recitation and participation in the ceremony of hoshanot in our prayer service. It is about water and rain, the one blessing that we must have to live comfortably. It is about nature and beauty, the four species of fruit and plants that are such a central commandment to our appreciation of the holiday. But to me, it is mostly a holiday of faith, perhaps even more than are the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There is a great Chasidic legend about a man who wanted to see a person who was truly wealthy. He went to his rebbe and asked for directions to find such a person. The rebbe sent him to a small village and told him to find a certain Reb Itzik and to stay the night with him. Arriving in the decrepit village the visitor eagerly searched out Reb Itzik. He was ushered into a ramshackle hut containing only straw for mattresses and broken wooden boxes for furniture. "Surely the rebbe must have been mistaken sending me here," he thought to himself.

After a very uncomfortable night spent on the straw covered floor and a very meager breakfast of hard bread and tepid water, the visitor in desperation

asked his host: "Reb Itzik, I heard you are a very wealthy man. Where is your wealth? How can you live under such circumstances as these?" Reb Itzik replied: "Oh, I have a great mansion with untold wealth located not far away. But, he continued, tell me where and of what type is your home?" The visitor replied: "Oh I live in a sturdy brick house with many comforts. But naturally when I am traveling, I make do with whatever accommodations are offered to me."

Reb Itzik replied: "My mansion is in Heaven, in immortality, in my generations that are yet to come. Here, I like you, am only a traveler so I also make do with whatever I have at hand. My brother, we are all only travelers." The visitor returned to his rebbe and thanked him for showing him a truly wealthy man.

Sleeping in the succah, outside of my comfortable but only temporary living quarters, gives me a sense of faith that I can build for myself a truly magnificent mansion with untold wealth not far away. Here in the succah I gladly make do with whatever I have at hand. But I am comforted that by living even only for a week in a succah, open to the elements and unpredictability of life and events themselves, I can concentrate on my true mansion and wealth - on spirit and family and generations and ancestors and hope and service to G-d and humans.

Our national succah has withstood all of the elements and all of the evil that the world contains and it still stands. It may wobble at times but it still stands. It still stands because of the mansions that we build constantly for us and all of Israel not far from here in the Jerusalem that hovers above our earthly Jerusalem.

We are all but travelers but that fact should not cause us discomfort or fear. For we are all truly wealthy and that is the Torah's great gift to us.

Sweet dreams in the succah.

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RABBI MORDECAI KAMENETZKY

Just Desserts

The Talmud in Tractate Avodah Zarah talks about the future. It details for us a scenario that will occur after the final redemption, when the G-d of the Jews and His Torah are known and accepted by all of mankind. The entire world will see the great reward meted to the small nation that endured an incessant exile while following the Torah scrupulously. Then the idol-worshippers from other nations will line up before G-d and complain, "what about us?" Had we been given the Torah we, too, would surely have kept it! Why are you only rewarding the Jewish people?" The Talmud tells us that G-d makes a deal. "All right," He tells them. "I'll give you one easy mitzvah. If you observe it

correctly, fine. However, if you do not, then your complaints are meaningless.

The Talmud tells us He will give them the mitzvah of Sukkah. G-d will then take out the sun in all its glory and the protection of the Sukkah will be no match for its rays. These idol-worshippers, predicts the Talmud, will kick the walls of the Sukkah and flee in disgust.

There are many mitzvos in the Torah. 613 to be exact. And there are quite a number of difficult ones. Some are conducive to despair and disheartenment without a broiling sun. Why, then, was the mitzvah of Sukkah chosen to be the cause celebri that differentiates our commitment to that of an idolator?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in his first book of the Magid Series tells the story of a Reb Avraham who was about to enter a restaurant one late spring afternoon. Upon entering, he noticed a familiar vagrant Jew, known to all as Berel the beggar, meandering outside.

Reb Berel, rumor had it, was a formidable Torah scholar back in the old country, but had his life shattered physically and emotionally by Nazi atrocities. He was a recluse, no one knew exactly where or how he lived: but he bothered no one, and not too many people bothered with him.

Reb Avraham asked the loner to join him for a meal. He was about to make a business trip up to Binghamton and figured that he might as well prepare for the trip with more than a hot meal—he would begin it with a good deed.

Reb Berel gladly accepted the offer; however, when it came time to order, he asked for nothing more than two baked apples and a hot tea. Reb Avraham's prodding could do nothing to increase the poor man's order. "All I need are two baked apples and a steaming tea," he insisted.

Reb Avraham's trip to Binghamton was uneventful until the rain and the darkness began to fall almost simultaneously. As if dancing in step, the darker it got, the heavier the deluge fell. All Reb Avraham remembered was the skidding that took him over the divider and into oncoming traffic on Route 17 in Harriman, New York. He came to shortly after two tow trucks had pulled his wrecked car from a ditch and lifted him to safety. Refusing hospitalization, he was driven to a nearby motel that was owned by the Friedmans, a Jewish couple who were readying the place for the summer migrations.

Mr. Friedman saw the battered Reb Avraham and quickly prepared a comfortable room for him. His wife quickly prepared a little something for him to eat. She brought it out to a shocked and bewildered Reb Avraham. On her serving tray were two baked apples and a glass of steaming tea.

When the Jews left Egypt, they had nothing to look at in the vast desert but faith. They built simple huts, almost in declaration: "Hashem we will do ours, we are sure You will do yours." And those simple huts,

those Sukkos, protected them from the heat, the cold, the wind, and the unknown. Hashem tells the prophet Jeremiah to tell his folk, "I remember the kindness of your youth as you followed Me in an unsowed desert." (Jeremiah 2:2)

Perhaps when the final redemption arrives, it will again be the simple Sukkah that will stand as the protectorate and advocate of the People who stood for 2,000 years in the face of idolators, who invited the Jews to join them... or die. So, when we enter the Sukkah this year, let us remember that it is only a small Sukkah stop on a long journey home. And when we arrive there, the Sukkah will be there once again to greet us as it was more than 3,300 years ago in the Sinai Desert. After all, it's nice to be served at the end of a 2,000-year-long journey with just desserts. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There is a custom each evening of Sukkot, to invite special guests-ushpizin—into the Sukkah. Every evening the patriarchs, matriarchs and their families are welcomed.

Ushpizin sets the tone for the holiday of Sukkot. The Sukkah itself is built outdoors open to the public. And the four species—the lulav and etrog—represent all types of Jews. If any one of the species is missing, the mitzvah is invalid, teaching the critical importance of each and every person. In a real sense, the ushpizin parallels the paragraph recited at the outset of the Passover Seder, wherein we invite guests to the seder table.

In Jewish history, there were towns that were especially hospitable; some were actually called ushpizin. My father was raised in Oswiecim which the Nazis later transformed into the notorious Auschwitz death camp. He once told me that the Jews referred to the town as Oshpizim, a Polish corruption of the word ushpizin, in tribute to the well-known hospitality of the Jewish residents to travelers and wayfarers.

We follow this approach by affectionately referring to our synagogue as "The Bayit." As a bayit, a home is a place of love and welcome, so too does the very name of our synagogue convey our basic credo of endless love and welcome.

Not coincidentally the custom of ushpizin falls just days after the high holidays. Many Jews primarily identify with their Judaism on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And so, immediately after the holidays, we leave the synagogue and build the Sukkah. In a sense we're saying, even if one finds it difficult to come to the synagogue, the synagogue will come to you.

This invitation is meant for all Jews, even the most extreme non-believer even an apikorus, one who rejects fundamental principles of faith. Note, each of the words in the text presented by Rabbi Elazar: "Know

what to answer a heretic—Da ma sh-tashiv l'apikorus." (Avot 2:14)

Da, to know, in the biblical sense means to love. In other words, react to the apikorus with love. Ma, of course, means what. When dealing with an apikorus, one ought to listen closely and respectfully to his or her questions and learn from them. Sh as a prefix asks us to pause. Tashiv can be related to the word teshuvah, which from a mystical perspective means to encourage the wrongdoer to return to the inner good that he or she possesses. The prefix Lamed of l'apikorus denotes that one is to have a direct I-thou encounter with the person who has gone astray.

Of course, wisdom and Torah knowledge are crucial in order to respond to an apikorus. Still, the approach should be one of endless love, using persuasive rather than coercive arguments. To those who have challenged a nonjudgmental approach to an apikorus, suggesting that it leads to a situation wherein there is neither tzaddik or rasha, I would argue that with regard to one's relationship to G-d, G-d must be that judge.

And that should be our approach as we recite the ushpizin. To embrace our people regardless of affiliation, commitment or background; to welcome them in with endless and infinite love. © 2000 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Weekly Thoughts

This Tuesday the festival of Succot begins. One of the Mitzvot of Succot is the Arba Minim, the four species (more often known as the Lulav and Etrog although these are only two of the four). The four species themselves symbolize the entirety of the Jewish people—each of them (palm, myrtle, willow and the etrog which is a citrus fruit which does not really have an accurate English translation!) has different characteristics—one has smell, one has taste, and so on. Just as in order to fulfill this commandment we need to bring together all four different species, similarly, the realization of our destiny depends on all of us acting together, whatever our individual characteristics. We wave the Four Species in all directions—East, South, West, North, Up and Down. This symbolizes both the omnipresence of G-d and also the scattered nature of the Jewish nation, which is spread out in all corners of the earth.

In Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) a lot of emphasis is placed on unity and one-ness, particularly the Oneness of G-d. The mystics delve deeper into the idea of unity as it is expressed through each of the Four Species:

The Lulav, the palm branch: Palm trees normally grow with their leaves spreading out, apart

from each other. The palm branch which we use for the Lulav is different. The palm branch itself is made up of many flat leaves, all packed closely together. They are joined at the top and bottom, giving the impression of being one, yet they remain individuals within this unified whole. From this we learn the importance of maintaining our individuality yet being part of a bigger whole, anchored together in unity.

The Haddasim, the myrtle branches: The leaves on the myrtle grow in threes along the stalk. According to Jewish Law, for the myrtle to be kosher and proper for the mitzvah, each group of three leaves must emerge from the same point, rather than one leaf being higher (or lower) than the others. From this we learn that to achieve true unity, no individual can perceive themselves as being above (or below) everyone else but each person must be treated equal.

The Aravot, the willow branches: Willows grow in very close clusters, offering protection and security from the elements. By being close to others, offering our help and protection, we are able to increase the protection and security for both ourselves and the other person.

The Etrog: This fruit possesses an amazing quality which no other fruit possesses. The Etrog, unlike most fruits, is not seasonal. In other words, it remains on the tree throughout all four seasons. Not only does it survive all four seasons, but it continues to grow the whole year round, through all different extremes. From this we are taught that we should grow from all our experiences and all our encounters, both positive and negative. By not only surviving but actually growing through all different extremes, to better ourselves and the world around us. This is perhaps the most profound lesson we can take from the Four Species—let's be an Etrog and let us hope that these lessons of the Four Species and the ideas of unity represented become a greater reality for all of us.
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RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The former Rosh Yeshiva of the Brisk Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Harav Yosef Berel Soloveitchik (zatzal) told the following story about his father, the Brisker Rav. It seems that he had the custom of acquiring 15 or 20 lulav and esrog sets for Sukkos. Each day of Sukkos he would make the blessing over the most beautiful set and shake it, and he would then shake all the others as well, just in case there should be any imperfection with the first. Well, one Sukkos, on the first day of Chol Hamoed, a telegram arrived informing the Rav that an esrog of an especially good quality had arrived from Morocco, and was waiting for him at Ben Gurion Airport. He asked his son (the Rosh Yeshiva) to go to the airport in a taxi to pick it up. His son did so immediately, but at the airport a problem developed with customs officials

over the esrog, and his son had to return empty-handed. The following day the son returned to the airport to argue again with the officials, again without success. This recurred every day, until finally, on Hoshana Rabba, the son traveled to the airport armed with a document from a lawyer. He was successful this time, and returned to his father with the esrog in the afternoon, shortly before Erev Shemini Atzeres. The Brisker Rav was able to give the esrog one shake, and Sukkos was over.

Was this worth all the trouble? Most of us would probably think not, but the Brisker Rav clearly thought that it was. To most of us, the mitzva of shaking the lulav is exciting the first time, after which the excitement tends to diminish. With the Brisker Rav it was the opposite. The mitzva stayed exciting and important each day until the very end.

Shemini Atzeres is the only festival for which the Torah does not give us a reason. We know the reasons for Pesach, Shavuos, Yom Kippur and so on, but no reason is given for Shemini Atzeres. Rashi has a beautiful parable to explain it. A father was visited by his sons. They stayed a few days, enjoyed one another's company, and had a good time together. When it was finally time for the sons to leave, the father said: "Stay one day longer! Not for any special reason, just that I don't want to see you go."

By the time that Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah come around, most of us are feeling "yontified out". The Yomim Tovim have probably been a strain emotionally, what with teshuva, and physically, what with building a sukka, preparing dinners, and having guests. We are inclined to be relieved at the return to our normal routines. Our attitude should, however, be the opposite! "Stay one day longer! Don't be so anxious to leave!"

The past three weeks of Yomim Tovim can be compared to the warmup that an athlete has before the main event, which is how we live our lives during the coming year.

There is a story about the Chafetz Chaim. After Hakkafos on Erev Shemini Atzeres, when everyone left the synagogue to go home for the Yomtov meal, he would stay behind to learn for an hour or two. (And we can imagine that Hakkafos would last a long time in Radin!) Someone asked the Chafetz Chaim: "Why don't you go home first, and enjoy your meal? Afterwards you can learn, if you wish." He gave the following answer: "If you arrive at a wedding during the feast, you will find everyone dancing. You won't be able to tell who belongs to the family of the bride or groom. If you want to find out who belongs to the family, you must wait until after the feast is over. Then everyone will leave except for the family members. During Hakofot everyone was dancing. Now that the feast is over, I want to show that I am a mechutan (in-law) of the Torah".

During Shmini Atzeres we say Yizkor to honor the memory of our departed parents. It is customary to make some commitment in the name of the departed one, since such a commitment counts to the credit of his or her soul. Commitments in the form of financial contributions are common, and I shall certainly not refuse any such contribution! But the commitment that I would really like to see everyone make is a commitment to studying Torah. I am convinced that the only way our community (or any Jewish community) will flourish and prosper is if each and every one of us makes a commitment to learn. And it should not be haphazard, but regular, systematic learning. If you cannot learn all day, learn one hour every evening. If you cannot manage that, learn two hours a week, or whatever you can manage. If you're not sure what to learn ask someone who knows. (I'll be glad to help if I can.) But make your commitment and stick to it. In this way, we can "stay one day longer", as G-d wants, and beyond that, for the rest of the year, be "mechutan to the Torah". © 1995 Rabbi Yaakov Haber

RABBI SHMUEL CHOUKA

The Rabbi's Message

On Simhat Torah we conclude the annual cycle of reading the Torah in public and start anew from Beresheet. This milestone is celebrated with much joy and festivity, and all Jews, men and women, young and old, learned and illiterate, participate. One may rightfully wonder, with what justification does the one who did not learn Torah throughout the year rejoice on Simhat Torah?

A popular explanation offered to this query is the following: A scholar who once witnessed an ignorant and non-observant Jew dancing and singing with all his strength on Simhat Torah, asked him, "Why are you rejoicing so much? Did you involve yourself with the Torah throughout the entire year?" The man in all sincerity replied, "While you are right that I was remiss in my involvement with Torah throughout the year, nevertheless if I am invited to my brother's wedding, isn't it appropriate for me to dance and sing? Thus, though my brother is really the ba'al simhah today, I am actively rejoicing with him."

As intriguing as this explanation may be, it is somewhat lacking, since after all, Simhat Torah is everyone's simhah and everyone is a ba'al simhah and not just a stranger attending a relative's affair.

The processions with the Torah are called "hakafot." Superficially, the name hakafot originated from the fact that we circle around the bimah and hakafot is from the same root as the word "makif" which means "circling around." However, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn, offers a more profound explanation of the word hakafot. He says that it means, "the extension of credit" as we say in Pirkei Abot (3:16), "Vehahenvani

makif—the shopkeeper extends credit." When one applies for credit and is notified that his application has been favorably accepted and his request is being granted, he is indeed very happy. Likewise, on Simhat Torah, the "shopkeeper" -- Hashem—says to each and every Jew, "I give you permission to rejoice with My Torah though your credit for Torah study and observance for the past year may not be exactly up to par. Dance today on credit, because I trust that you will make good during the coming year." When Hashem personally extends the Jew credit, the joy is overwhelming. (Vedibarta Bam) Shabbat Shalom.

A Pure Heart

"And you shall take for yourself on the first day the fruit of a [citron] beautiful tree." (Vayikra 23:40)

The halachah requires that an etrog must be beautiful, meaning that it must be free of blemishes. Even a minor defect may disqualify an etrog.

Why are the specifications for the etrog stricter than those for the other three species? Why is virtual perfection demanded only for the etrog?

The Midrash states that the leaf of the hadas, myrtle branch, is shaped like the eye, and its use in the misvah of the four species symbolizes to us that we must dedicate our eyes to the service of G-d, and not allow them to gaze upon things that would tempt us to sin. The leaf of the arabah, willow branch, resembles the lips, teaching us to guard our lips from speaking evil. The lulav, palm branch, represents the spinal cord, which controls all our actions, symbolizing that they are all devoted to fulfilling Hashem's will. The etrog resembles the heart, for one's thoughts and feelings should be absorbed with sanctity.

Ideally, while sight, speech and deed should be completely involved with holiness, a deviation in any of these areas may be an isolated phenomenon and may not affect the whole being. Not so with thought and feeling. They affect everything one does. The heart's devotion must be complete, and there is, therefore, a greater requirement that the heart be pure. The etrog, which represents the heart, must therefore be completely beautiful, without the slightest defect. (Growing Each Day) © 2000 Rabbi S. Choueka and Torah Center of Deal



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